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Death for spies pushed in bill by GOP senator

By Charles Wheeler
and Walter Andrews
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Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, introduced a bill calling for death by firing squad of anyone convicted of selling national security secrets and yesterday said such executions should be televised as a deterrent.

"I'm sorry to say it would not apply to the Walkers," he said. "But anyone arrested in connection with the case after passage of the law could come under the new penalty."

The bill would establish a new federal crime of "treasonous espionage" — the unauthorized disclosure of national defense secrets for profit.

If the bill is passed quickly, it could apply to any subsequent arrests in the Navy spy case, Sen. Stevens said.

The Stevens bill also calls for live video and audio taping of any execution and the release to the public of such tapes. Executions ought to be televised as well, he said.

"I don't ever want to see an execution — I want the deterrent force of our criminal law to come into play," said Sen. Stevens. "But if there is an execution, it ought to be public."

"I don't think there is the kind of penalty for spying that there ought to be," Sen. Stevens said. "Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but I just believe a spy ought to be shot."

"What security can we find in arms talks when the foundations of our defensive systems are stripped away by our own men?" he asked as he introduced the bill Wednesday. "Nothing twists the honest ethic this country represents more than the grasping, degenerate act of auctioning off the security of the nation."

The proposed law would apply only if the secrets involved are sufficiently related to national defense, but would avoid having this point debated in a public trial. The judge would decide.

Sen. Stevens introduced the bill within 24 hours after Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger said convicted spies, who now face a maximum of life imprisonment, "should be shot." He added, "I suppose hanging is the preferred method."

"The essence of this crime," Sen. Stevens said, "is the act of transferring the information for money. Current laws address the gathering and transfer of sensitive information, but no section differentiates sale from other motivations."

"This legislation would punish those who act without even the lame justification of furthering political ideals," he said. "These people are motivated by greed alone."

When asked if his comments might prevent the suspects in the Walker case from getting a fair trial, Sen. Stevens said:

"No, we are trying to bring up the visibility of the very crime itself and deter some people who may be just starting down this road. These people are literally seduced by our enemies into a path of espionage."

"We want to make more people cognizant

of the fact that there's going to be the most severe penalty we can possibly devise," Sen. Stevens said. "The real challenge we have now coming from those who want our secrets is that they are in fact, buying them."

Attorney General Edwin Meese III made the same point in a press conference, saying: "I think it would serve as a deterrent. It certainly would be in case of the persons on whom it is imposed."

In Baltimore, John Walker's court-appointed attorney has already obtained a temporary court order forbidding Assistant FBI Director Bill Baker to discuss any aspects of the John Walker case that are not part of the public record, and yesterday asked that this order be extended to everyone connected with the case.

The Army and Air Force, as well as the Navy, have expressed growing concerns that their secret communications links may have been breached by a spy operation allegedly conducted by John Walker Jr., 47, a retired Navy warrant officer.

Those under arrest — John Walker, his son Michael, 22, a Navy Seaman, his brother Arthur, 50, a retired lieutenant commander, and Jerry Whitworth, a former Navy radioman — all at times had various levels of secret clearances.

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Admiral Wesley L. McDonald, who heads the Navy's Atlantic Command, said the information may have helped the Soviets build submarines that are harder for the United States to detect.

"This may have led to the Soviets getting a little bit smarter, because we've seen the Soviets developing much quieter submarines," he said.

All the military services are checking their secret communications links to see if they had been compromised by the alleged disclosures, the Pentagon said yesterday.

Adm. James Watkins, the chief of naval operations, said last Tuesday that the Navy assumes the Soviets gained access to certain secret voice and teletype communications systems because some of the accused spies had access to them.

Other military services use some of the same communications equipment and communicate with each other over similar military communications circuits, Pentagon spokesman Michael Burch said.

"As a result of the Walker case, the services are going back and looking at that point in time during which there may have been an exchange of information, there may have been communications," Mr. Burch said.

Mr. Burch declined comment on the extent the services shared communications codes.

However, he said the military communications system is one that has built-in safeguards. One of those safeguards is that it is continually changing.